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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S VISIT TO CAUCA, JULY 30, 2008

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The Ambassador traveled on July 30 to the Department of Cauca to meet with local political, security, and civil society representatives, as well as to visit USAID sponsored sites in and around Popayan, Cauca. During his visit he emphasized the U.S.-Colombia partnership in matters of security and development. The Ambassador received a briefing on military and counter-narcotics operations in the region from Brigadier General Alfonso Barrero. He and USAID Mission Director Susan Reichle visited three USAID partnered projects: a water treatment facility, a specialty coffee farm, and a community social services center. The Ambassador also had lunch with the governor of Cauca, the mayor of Popayan, the rector of the University of Cauca, members of the Chamber of Commerce of Cauca, and members of the department's governing council. Governor Guillermo Alberto Gonzalez accompanied the Ambassador throughout the day.

Security and Military Operations in Cauca

¶2. (SBU) Brigadier General Leonardo Alfonso Barrero Cordillo of the 29th Colombian Army Brigade briefed Ambassador Brownfield on the progress of security in Cauca, highlighting the increase in demobilized, captured, and killed guerillas in the region. Barrero said that they had already captured 266 guerillas in 2008 compared to 332 in all of 2007. In addition, he pointed out that their specific targeting of narcotics trafficking has resulted in the capture 1,209 kilos of processed cocaine in 2008 compared to 409 kilos in 2007 and the destruction of 97 drug laboratories so far in 2008 compared to 164 for all of 2007. Barrero also lauded the partnership between the Colombian military and the US MILGRP which has helped fund the construction of a health center, a school, and an emergency room in Corinto, Cauca that will open soon.

¶3. (SBU) Ambassador asked about reports of tension between the army and indigenous communities in Cauca. Barrero admitted to some tension. He attributed it to two factors: 1) young indigenous leaders from the far left in some communities, and 2) land title disputes between some indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.

Partnerships Promote Opportunity, Development and Access to Services

¶4. (U) The Ambassador visited three USAID projects in the Popayan area that have increased local access to services for vulnerable populations and alternative development. The Ambassador toured the Rio Negro Water Treatment Facility. USAID contributed US\$300,000 to the US\$454,000 project which resulted in the construction of the largest water treatment plant in the country that uses a non-chemical treatment process. The water treatment facility benefits 7,000 people including vulnerable families as well as 1,224 internally displaced persons (IDPs) across three municipalities. The local community supported the project and is responsible for its

construction, management and ongoing operations. The Ambassador spoke with a number of key community leaders involved in the project as well as vulnerable and internally displaced beneficiaries of the facility.

¶5. (U) The Ambassador visited a coffee farm that participates in USAID's Specialty Coffee Program 'CAFES'. The CAFES program provides an economic alternative to coca by working with thousands of specialty coffee farmers across Colombia, their producer associations, and international and Colombian specialty coffee private sector entities to open new market niches for specialty coffee. USAID assistance reaches more than 10% of the 80,000 coffee farmers in Cauca. The Ambassador was given a tour by the farm owner and was accompanied by the governor, a Cauca representative of the National Coffee Federation and USAID's local partners. The tour highlighted how coffee is grown and processed, the benefits of specialty coffee, and accompanying food security activities. Media was present for the tour and subsequent coffee tasting ceremony where local specialty coffees were graded for quality.

¶6. (U) The Ambassador concluded his visit to Popayan with a stop at the Centro de Atencion Integral de la Familia (CAIF), a community social services center that benefits the local internally displaced and vulnerable population. CAIF's construction was funded by USAID, FundaColombia(Coca-Cola Foundation) and Cauca's Pension Social Fund (COMFACAUCA) to provide integrated social services to vulnerable families and IDP's, including nutrition, training for parents, childcare, and social and cultural activities for children. The CAIF benefits 532 children, 192 parents, and 50 pregnant women

Positive Press Coverage

¶6. (U) The Ambassador's visit received extensive local print and broadcast coverage, which served to emphasize USG soft side support to the southeastern Department of Cauca. PAS organized an exclusive interview with Popayan's main daily, El Liberal (traditionalist/liberalist editorial line; readership 75,000), which ran under the headline "A Visit with a Coffee Aroma" and featured the Ambassador's visit to the coffee farm. RCN Radio (listeners 607,300) also featured the Ambassador's visit to CAIF. Press coverage allowed us to deliver basic public affairs messages about US support for vulnerable communities, alternatives to illicit drugs, trade and investment opportunities, and the "soft side" of US support for Colombia.

¶8. COMMENT: Cauca is a front line department in many of Colombia's strategic challenges. It has many IDP's, large Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, residual FARC along its Pacific coast and eastern sectors, and some remaining coca production. It is, in short, Colombia's national challenge in microcosm. This visit suggests they are moving in the right direction on their challenges.

BROWNFIELD